

Summer internship makes preservation studies fun

From China, via New York, to Louisiana

By Yuan Ren
Student Intern, Historic Building Recovery Grant Program

When I arrived in New Orleans in late May and saw the French Quarter for the first time, I was so excited that I almost screamed. I was totally impressed by the cheerful colors and the variety of building styles, the beautiful historic doors and windows, and the excellent cast iron work.

I'm a graduate student in Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program. My conservation professor,

metropolis near Beijing in Northern China. It is a city that boasts various Western colonial buildings. Actually, in China few cities can match it in the richness of architectural styles. My university courses and field projects inspired me, deepened my love for Chinese traditional architecture, and increased my awareness of the need for historic preservation.

My field experience confirmed my



Photo by Rong He

Buildings like the Wu Yue Temple, built in China's Shanxi Province during the 18th century, helped stimulate student intern Yuan Ren's commitment to historic preservation. Here Yuan measures the dougong support brackets on the temple's roof. The building's size dwarfs her.

structural analyses for owners of damaged historic homes.)

I am intrigued by the experimental quality of the Historic Building Recovery Grant Program; it is the first time in the United States that federal money has been granted directly to individuals for historic preservation work following a disaster. It has been very interesting for me to see the difference in people's approach to their own projects. As far as I know in China it is rare to have preserva-

tion projects done by the owners themselves. Usually, projects have to be processed under the requirements of local governments – some of them know what they are doing, while others do not. Unfortunately the people who are most closely connected to the buildings are ignored.

Columbia University master's student Yuan Ren spent three months in New Orleans this summer as an intern with the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation's Historic Building Recovery Grant Program. The Crescent City is one of the best preservation learning laboratories in the nation and provided Yuan with a multitude of valuable professional experiences.



Photo by Tracy Nelson



Photo by Rong He

Michael Devonshire, introduced me to a great summer internship with the Historic Building Recovery Grant Program in New Orleans. Honestly, Southern fried chicken and Katrina were the only things I knew about New Orleans and the Deep South before I came here, but I have learned so much more very quickly.

At the beginning of the internship, my colleague Stephen Fowlkes showed me around the different historic districts. It has been really amazing to see the adaptations and alterations of buildings in response to the flood and hurricane damage.

As a student majoring in preservation, I always feel lucky to have been born in Amoy (Xiamen) in Southern China, a city famous for the Ling Nan Style Arcade Buildings. In the rural country near Amoy, many round to *lou* buildings in the unique Hakka style stand among the mountains and attract millions of visitors every year. Growing up in Amoy gave me a great appreciation for historic monuments.

In 2003, I was accepted to the School of Architecture of Tianjin University, located in Tianjin, a

resolve to devote myself to historic preservation. As the oldest surviving civilization on earth, China may have the longest tradition of architecture. However, compared to Western countries, our country may be backward in historic preservation. I decided to pursue graduate study in the United States and was admitted to Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program in 2008.

My first year at Columbia gave me an introduction to preservation in the States, especially in New York City. Most of my coursework was based on the rich historic environment of the city, such as research on the historic buildings in Washington Heights and reuse of the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Powerhouse designed by McKim, Mead, and White. I am very interested in traditional materials and construction of historic buildings, so I was especially focused in my conservation studies class that Michael Devonshire taught. (Editor's note: Michael Devonshire was an "early and often" volunteer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation and PRC after Hurricane Katrina doing